

# 8

## (Catukka) Nāga Sutta

The (Fours) Discourse on the Bull Elephant | **A 4.114 (Rāja) Nāga Sutta** The Discourse on the (Royal) Bull Elephant

Theme: The 4 qualities of a truly worthy monastic

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2014

### 1 Introduction

**1.1 The (Rāja) Nāga Sutta** (A 4.114) gives a list of **4 qualities** of a truly worthy monastic, that is, one who is “worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of gifts, worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms, a supreme field of merit for the world” [§7]. More specifically, this refers to an arhat [§12].

**1.2** The Sutta is divided into two almost equal sections. The first section is about the 4 qualities of a **royal bull elephant** that is “worthy of the king, of service to the king, and is reckoned as a limb [an emblem] of the king” [§1]. The 4 qualities are described as those of “a listener, a destroyer, a forbearer, and a goer” [§1.2]. Each of these qualities is then elaborated [§§2-6]. This is the parable section of the Sutta.

In the Dharma section, we see, “in the same way” (*evam eva*), the 4 qualities of a **monastic or renunciant** who is truly worthy [§7; 1.1]: he is also one who is “a listener, a destroyer, a forbearer, and a goer” [§8].

### 2 Related sutta

**2.1 The (Nāga) Sotā Sutta** (A 5.140) has the same 4 qualities as those of **the (Rāja) Nāga Sutta** (A 4.114), plus one more—that of “the warder” (*rakkhita*)—listed as the third.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, the rest of the two suttas are identical, dealing with the qualities of a truly worthy monastic.<sup>2</sup> Here, “warder” means the royal bull elephant, when in battle, knows when and how to ward off any attack or harm to itself or its rider.

**2.2** Another parable on elephant-training is found in **the Danta,bhūmi Sutta** (M 125).<sup>3</sup> The elephant parable here, however, has a different emphasis from that of the (Rāja) Nāga Sutta. While the elephant parable of **the (Rāja) Nāga Sutta** refers to self-training and personal qualities, the parable of the Danta,bhūmi refers to how a teacher (the elephant forester and the elephant tamer) trains a **disciple**. While the former centres on the pupil, the latter centres on the teacher. In this sense, they complement each other with regards to teaching and learning the Dharma-Vinaya.

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<sup>1</sup> A 5.140/3:161-164 (SD 46.9).

<sup>2</sup> For details of this missing 3<sup>rd</sup> figure and quality, see **(Pañcaka) Sotā S** (A 5.140), SD 46.9 (2.1).

<sup>3</sup> M 125,12 (SD 46.3).

## (Catukka) Nāga Sutta

### The (Fours) Discourse on the Bull Elephant

A 4.114

THE ROYAL BULL ELEPHANT PARABLE

#### The 4 qualities of a royal bull elephant

**1** Bhikshus, a **royal bull elephant** that possesses 4 qualities is worthy of the king, of service to the king, and is reckoned as a limb [an emblem] of the king.<sup>4</sup>

What are the four?

1.2 Here, bhikshus, the royal bull elephant is a listener, a destroyer, a forbearer, and a goer.<sup>5</sup>

#### (1) The royal elephant that listens

**2** And how, bhikshus, is the royal bull elephant a **listener**? (*sotā*)

Here, bhikshus, whatever task the elephant trainer gives it, whether it has done it before or not, the royal elephant is receptive,<sup>6</sup> pays attention to it, fully directs its mind to it, with ready ear, listens to it.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, bhikshus, is the royal bull elephant a listener.

#### (2) The royal elephant that destroys

**3** And how, bhikshus, is the royal elephant bull a **destroyer**? (*hantā*)

Here, bhikshus, when the royal bull elephant has gone into battle, it *destroys* elephant and mahout [elephant-rider], **[117]** it *destroys* chariot and charioteer, it *destroys* the infantry.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, bhikshus, is the royal bull elephant a destroyer.

<sup>4</sup> *Catūhi bhikkhave aṅgehi samannāgato rañño nāgo rājā, raho hoti rāja, bhoggo rañño aṅgan't'eva saṅkham gacchati.* The phrase *rājāraho hoti rāja, bhoggo rañño aṅgan't'eva saṅkham gacchati* recurs (with a minor variation) at **M 125,12.14/3:133, A 3.94,1/1:244, 3.131,1/1:284, 4.112,2/2:113, 4.181,1/2:170.**

<sup>5</sup> *Idha bhikkhave rañño nāgo sotā ca hoti hantā ca khantā ca gantā ca.*

<sup>6</sup> "Is receptive," or amenable, *aṭṭhi, katvā*, lit "making that its purpose," absol of *attha* ("matter, meaning, sense) + *karoti*, "to do"; CPD: "realizing the nature or value of an object (for further consideration), making something open for consideration, or making oneself receptive (of what is preached), having been attentive, mostly in the formula, ~ *manasikatvā sabba, cetaso* (vl *sabbaṃ cetasā* or *cetaso*) *samannāharitvā*, D 2:204,27; M 1:325,6, 445,33, 3:201,22; A 2:116,32, 3:163,4; U 80,6 (cf UA 389,1-10) ≈ S 1:112,5 = 189,32; S 5:95,19-96,1; S 2:220,25; J 5:151,12\*; Sn 317 (~*karvāna*); V 1:103,20', 4:144,32\*\*; J 5:151,12\*. Ce Ee Se **aṭṭhi, katvā**; Be *aṭṭhiṃ katvā* (Comy: *aṭṭhiko hutva*, "become receptive"): cf D 2:204; M 3:201; S 1:112, 141, 5:95; A 2:116, 3:162; U 80; J 522/5:151; V 4:144. See CPD: *aṭṭhi-katvā* & DP: *aṭṭhikatvā, aṭṭhikatvāna*.

<sup>7</sup> *Idha bhikkhave rañño nāgo yam enaṃ hatthi, damma, sārathi kāraṇaṃ kāreti yadi vā kata, pubbaṃ, yadi vā akata, pubbaṃ, taṃ aṭṭhi, katvā* [Ce Ee Se, A 3:162; Be *aṭṭhiṃ katvā*] *manasi katvā sabbaṃ cetaso* [Be *sabba, cetasā*] *samannāharitvā ohita, soto suṇāti* (A 4.114,2/2:116), SD 46.8 = (A 5.140,3/3:161 f), SD 46.9.

<sup>8</sup> *Idha bhikkhave rañño nāgo saṅgāma, gato hatthim pi hanati* [Ee hanti throughout], *hatth'āruham pi hanati, assam pi hanati, ass'āruham pi hanati, ratham pi hanati, rathikam pi hanati, pattikam pi hanati.*

### (3) The royal elephant that forbears

**4** And how, bhikshus, is the royal elephant bull a **forbearer**? (*khantā*)

Here, bhikshus, when the royal bull elephant *has gone into battle*, it endures being hit by spears, by swords, and by arrows; and endures the noises and din of the bheri [a conical drum], cymbals, conch-shells, and the dindima [a small drum].<sup>9</sup>

Thus, bhikshus, is the royal bull elephant a forbearer.

### (4) The royal elephant that goes rightly

**5** And how, bhikshus, is the royal elephant bull a **goer**? (*gantā*)

Here, bhikshus, in whichever direction the elephant trainer *sends* the royal bull elephant, whether or not it has gone there before, it *quickly goes* there.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, bhikshus, is the royal bull elephant a goer.

**6** A royal bull elephant, bhikshus, that possesses these 4 qualities is worthy of the king, of service to the king, and is reckoned as a limb [an emblem] of the king.

## THE MONASTIC WITH 4 WORTHY QUALITIES

### The 4 qualities of a worthy monastic

<b>7</b> In the same way, bhikshus, a <b>monk</b> who possesses 4 <u>qualities</u> is	
worthy of offerings, <sup>11</sup>	<i>āhuneyyo</i>
worthy of hospitality,	<i>pāhuneyyo</i>
worthy of gifts, <sup>12</sup>	<i>dakkhiṇeyyo</i>
worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms,	<i>añjali, karaṇīyo</i>
a supreme field of merit for the world. <sup>13</sup>	<i>anuttaraṃ puñña-k, khettaṃ lokassa.</i>

What are the four?

**8** Here, bhikshus, a monk is a listener, a destroyer, a forbearer, and a goer.

### (1) The monk who is a listener

**9** And how, bhikshus, is a monk a **listener** (*sotā*)?

<sup>9</sup> *Idha bhikkhave rañño nāgo saṅgāma, gato khamo hoti satti-p, pahārānaṃ asi-p, pahārānaṃ usu-p, pahārānaṃ pharasu-p, pahārānaṃ<sup>9</sup> bheri, paṇava, saṅkha, tiṇava, ninnāda, saddānaṃ.* This parable recurs in **Danta, bhūmi S** (M 125), where it forms part of a skill known as “the imperturbable” (*āneñja*), ie, the ability to remain still against all odds and dangers in battle (M 125, 13/3:133) + SD 46.3 (4). On the various sounds, see **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2, 92), SD 8.10.

<sup>10</sup> *Idha bhikkhave rañño nāgo yam enaṃ hatthi, damma, sārathi disaṃ peseti yadi vā gata, pubbaṃ, yadi vā agata, pubbaṃ, taṃ khippam eva gantā hoti.*

<sup>11</sup> *Āhuneyyo.* That is, worthy of receiving sacrifices or offerings. The Skt cognate *āhavaniya* refers to that which was offered as an oblation as in *āhuneyy’aggī*, one of the 3 brahminical sacrificial fires (the one in the east).

<sup>12</sup> *Dakkhiṇeyyo.* Specifically refers to gifts, ie, offerings, made by the living for the benefit of the departed by way of dedication of merits to them.

<sup>13</sup> These are the last 5 of the 9 qualities of the sangha of noble ones (awakened saints). For details on each of these qualities, see **Attha, puggala S 1** (A 8.59), SD 15.10a(1).

Here, bhikshus, when the Dharma-Vinaya [the teaching and discipline] declared by the Tathagata, is being taught, he is *receptive*, pays attention to it, fully directs his mind to it, with ready ear, listens to it.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, bhikshus, is the monk a listener.

## (2) The monk who is a destroyer

**10** And how, bhikshus, is a monk **a destroyer** (*hantā*)?

Here, bhikshus, a monk *does not tolerate* any sensual thought that has arisen:

he abandons, dispels, *destroys*, makes an end of it, brings it to non-existence.<sup>15</sup>

he does not tolerate any thought of ill will that has arisen:

he abandons, dispels, *destroys*, makes an end of it, brings it to non-existence.

he does not tolerate any thought of violence that has arisen:

he abandons, dispels, *destroys*, makes an end of it, brings it to non-existence.

Thus, bhikshus, is the monk a destroyer.

## (3) The monk who is a forbearer

**11** And how, bhikshus, is a monk **a forbearer** (*khantā*)?

Here, bhikshus, a monk bears

heat, cold, hunger, thirst, the touch of mosquitoes, flies, the wind, the sun, and creeping creatures;<sup>16</sup>

endures the ways of *words* ill-spoken, unwelcome;<sup>17</sup> **[118]**

and arisen *bodily feelings* that are painful, racking, sharp, piercing, repugnant, disagreeable, deadly.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, bhikshus, is the monk a forbearer.

<sup>14</sup> *Idha bhikkhave tathāgata-p, pavedite dhamma, vinaye desiyamāne aṭṭhim katvā manasi katvā sabba, cetasā samannāharitvā ohita, soto suṇāti.* (A 4.114, 7/2:117), SD 46.8 = (A 5.140, 9/3:163), SD 46.9.

<sup>15</sup> The above 2 lines: *Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu uppannam kāma, vitakkaṃ nādhivāseti pajahati vinodeti hanati* [only Be] *vyantī, karoti anabhāvaṃ gameti.*

<sup>16</sup> *Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu khamo hoti sītassa uṇhassa jighacchāya pipāsāya ḍaṃsa, makasa, vātātapa, sarīsapa, samphassānam.*

<sup>17</sup> *Duruttānam durāgatānam vacana, pathānam.* Comy here is silent, but Comy at **A 5.140** gives these glosses. *Durutta* (*du-v-utta*, “badly uttered”) means the utterance of improper speech, rough words on account of anger (*duruttanan’ti na suṭṭhu vuttānam dosa, vasena pavattitānam pharusa, vacanānam*). *Durāgata* means arriving at the ear-door because of the arising of unsatisfactoriness (*durāgatānan’ti dukkh’uppādan’ākārena sota, dvāram āgatānam*). (AA 3:287)

<sup>18</sup> *Uppannānam sārīkānam vedanānam dukkhānam tibbānam kharānam kaṭukānam asātānam amanāpānam pāṇ’aharānam adhivāsaka, jātiko hoti.* A person under 20 is unlikely to be able to endure these hardships, and is therefore not allowed to be ordained (V 4:130). The passage (beginning “bears heat...” to here) recurs in **Sabb’āsa-va S** (M 2/1:10), SD 30.3; **Kāya, gata, sati S** (M 119, 35/3:97), SD 12.21; **Danta, bhūmi S** (M 125, 30/3:136 f), SD 46.3; **(Rāja) Nāga S** (A 4.114/2:117 f), SD 46.8; **Ātappa, karaṇīya S** (A 3.49/1:153) ×2; **(Rāja) Nāga S** (A 4.114/2:118), SD 46.8; **(Dve) Roga S** (A 4.157/2:143), SD 42.16; **Khama Paṭipadā S 2** (A 4.165/2:153) ×2; **Upaṭṭhāka S 1** (A 5.123/-3:144); **(Pañcaka) Sota S** (A 5.140(5)/3:163), SD 51.13; **(Chakka) Āsava S** (A 6.58(3)/3:389), SD 62.1; **Ākaṅkha S** (A 10.71(6)/5:132), SD 82.12; **Nm 2:487**; **V 1:78** ×2, 302+303 (*uppannānam...etc*), 3:321, 322 ×2, 327, 4:130. See **Sabba, kamma, jaha S** (U 3.1.4/21), SD 37.3 n, for detailed refs.

(4) The monk who is a goer

**12** And how, bhikshus, is a monk a goer (*gantā*)?

Here, bhikshus, a monk arrives in those quarters where, in this long journey, he has never been before,

that is to say,<sup>19</sup>

the stilling of all formations,

the relinquishing of all substrates [acquisitions],<sup>20</sup>

the destruction of craving,

the fading away (of lust),

the ending (of suffering),

nirvana—

he himself<sup>21</sup> *quickly* arrives there.

Thus, bhikshus, is the monk a goer.

*sabba,saṅkhāra,samatha*

*sabbūpadhi,paṭinissagga*

*taṇhā-k,khaya*

*virāga*

*nirodha*

*nibbāṇa*

**13** A monk, bhikshus, who possesses these 4 qualities is worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of gifts, worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms, a supreme field of merit for the world.”

— evaṃ —

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<sup>19</sup> The foll upadhi passage is stock: see SD 48.13 (1.1.4). Here, this passage is a description (as far as words go) of nirvana: see also (**Āsava-k,khaya**) **Jhāna S** (A 9.36), SD 33.8. It is also called the “**solitude from the substrates**” (*upadhi,viveka*), ie, liberation from those factors that hold us back in samsara: see SD 20.4 (4.2.2). In meditative terms, it defines **the perception of cessation** (*nirodha,saññā*): A 10.60/5:110 f @ SD 19.16). The terms of this formula, esp the latter ones, are discussed in **Viveka,nissita**, SD 20.4.

<sup>20</sup> Nm 27, 140, 157, 341; DA 169; MA 2:142; UA 163, 206, 231, 396; SA 3:122; DhA 2:103, 3:129. See SD 29.6a (1.5) & **Viveka,nissita**, SD 20.4 esp (4). “Substrates” refers to the substrates of existence, whatever keeps us in samsara and suffering, ie, the 5 aggregates, sensual desire, mental defilements, and karma (Sn 33c, 33d || 364a, 34c, 374c, 546a = 572a, 728ce = 1051ac): see SD 48.13 (1.1.4).

<sup>21</sup> “He himself,” (*so*) *yeva*, refers to self-effort.